
Hidden report raises serious questions over APVMA fee overhaul

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CropLife Australia is calling on the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) to stop hiding and release the independent market analysis underpinning changes to Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) cost recovery policy, after refusing access to the report under Freedom of Information on Cabinet-in-Confidence grounds.

Announced in May 2026 and scheduled to commence on 1 July 2027, the new policy will require the APVMA to recover the full cost of most regulatory assessments through upfront fees, while reducing sales-based levies by 40 per cent. It replaces the existing 40:60 model, where application fees covered 40 per cent of assessment costs and sales-based levies covered the remaining 60 per cent.

DAFF commissioned an external consultant to assess whether the existing model was meeting its objectives and examine the market impacts of potential changes.

"Clearly, DAFF has mistaken commissioning an external report for doing the policy work itself. Understanding the impacts of cost recovery and consulting meaningfully with industry should be core responsibilities of the Department," said CropLife Australia Chief Executive Officer, Mr Matthew Cossey.

DAFF has cited the analysis in support of reform, including findings that there was "limited evidence that the current 40:60 split achieves its core objective of supporting market entry" and that moving towards fee-for-service charges "is not expected to create material barriers to market entry."

"These are significant claims, yet DAFF failed to meaningfully consult industry on the policy before recommendations were made or after it received them. Stakeholders are meant to blindly trust a policy on the strengths of findings from an independent assessment that the Department is refusing to release," said Mr Cossey.

About CropLife Australia

CropLife Australia is the national peak industry organisation representing the plant science sector in Australia. CropLife's members are the world-leading innovators, developers, manufacturers and formulators of crop protection and crop biotechnology products. The plant science industry, worth more than \$31.6 billion a year to Australian agricultural production, provides products to protect crops against pests, weeds and diseases, as well as developing crop biotechnologies key to the nation's agricultural productivity, profitability and sustainability. CropLife is a part of the plant science industry's 91 country international federation.



“If the Department’s Agvet policy branch lacks the capacity or capability to consult properly with the industry it regulates and simply uses consultants to do the work and then keep that work secret, serious questions need to be asked about what purpose it serves at all.

“Higher upfront fees could affect which products companies choose to register or maintain in Australia, particularly where markets are small or registration costs are high relative to expected sales. This will have consequences for competition, innovation and the technologies available to Australian farmers.

“The refusal to release the report raises broader concerns about misuse of the FOI Act to hide information. It is clear that DAFF has no commitment to transparency and accountability in policy development and is ignoring the clear public statements of the executive government on this issue.

“Is this a failure of judgement, a failed policy, or a broader culture within the Department that treats transparency as an inconvenience?

The lack of meaningful consultation perpetuates the concern raised by the Australian Public Service Commission’s Capability Review in 2023, which recommended DAFF take a more “user-centric” approach to stakeholder engagement.

“The Public Service Commission’s Capability Report was handed down two departmental secretaries ago, yet the Department’s limited approach to stakeholder engagement continues to stifle its ability to develop the policy solutions Australians deserve.

“It is alarming that DAFF was prepared to put forward recommendations for a major policy change without properly testing them with the industry affected.

“The Department has put the Minister in a difficult position. The Government should not be expected to sign off on a policy of this significance without a transparent evidence base and confidence that the consequences for Australian agriculture have been properly considered,” said Mr Cossey.

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CropLife Australia has sought a review of the FOI refusal and is calling on the Department to release the independent analysis, including its methodology and supporting model, subject only to necessary and properly justified redactions. It is also calling for meaningful re-engagement with industry before the new arrangements are implemented.

“If industry is expected to pay the full efficient cost of most APVMA assessments, there must be transparent performance measures, reliable statutory timeframes and clear reporting on how additional revenue supports the regulator’s broader responsibilities.

“The Department’s job is to help the Government make sound policy in the national interest, not shield its recommendations from scrutiny,” Mr Cossey concluded.

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